

Anyway Erskine stared into right field,  
back to the dugout, hat in hand,  
wiping his forehead with his forearm.  
He was not Ralph Branca on the clubhouse steps.  
The stands were mostly empty.  
Furillo and Reese and Snider, Hodges and Campy and Cox,  
were already on the sidelines.  
It was spring and rained all morning,  
so the stands were empty. He finished  
the inning, then on his way to the dugout, careful  
not to step on the third-base foul-line,  
handed the ball to the umpire  
like a small kid handing over something  
that didn't belong to him. He didn't say  
anything, just tossed his glove onto the bench,  
and sat looking out at the field of empty bases,  
vacant as a blank schedule, a calendar  
with no pitching dates penciled in.

There was nothing anybody could do.  
The last nail in his coffin, the ballplayers said.  
A rock at the mouth of the sepulcher.

An inning later he picked up another ball  
and wrapped his fingers around it,  
looked at the configuration, the connections,  
the threads crossed one over one.  
He held it for a moment, just a moment,  
then dropped it back into the ball sack.